

loan and grant origination and servicing. Procedures for implementing these regulations can be found in program handbooks, available in any Rural Development office. Any provision on the expenditure of funds under this part is contingent upon the availability of funds.

#### **§ 3550.2 Purpose.**

The purpose of the direct RHS single family housing loan programs is to provide low- and very low-income people who will live in rural areas with an opportunity to own adequate but modest, decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings and related facilities. The section 502 program offers persons who do not currently own adequate housing, and who cannot obtain other credit, the opportunity to acquire, build, rehabilitate, improve, or relocate dwellings in rural areas. The section 504 program offers loans to very low-income homeowners who cannot obtain other credit to repair or rehabilitate their properties. The section 504 program also offers grants to homeowners age 62 or older who cannot obtain a loan to correct health and safety hazards or to make the unit accessible to household members with disabilities.

#### **§ 3550.3 Civil rights.**

RHS will administer its programs fairly, and in accordance with both the letter and the spirit of all equal opportunity and fair housing legislation and applicable executive orders. Loans, grants, services, and benefits provided under this part shall not be denied to any person based on race, color, national origin, sex, religion, marital status, familial status, age, physical or mental disability, receipt of income from public assistance, or because the applicant has, in good faith, exercised any right under the Consumer Credit Protection Act (15 U.S.C. 1601 *et seq.*). All activities under this part shall be accomplished in accordance with the Fair Housing Act (42 U.S.C. 3601–3620), Executive Order 11246, and Executive Order 11063, as amended by Executive Order 12259, as applicable. The civil rights compliance requirements for RHS are in 7 CFR part 1901, subpart E.

#### **§ 3550.4 Reviews and appeals.**

Whenever RHS makes a decision that is adverse to a participant, RHS will provide the participant with written notice of such adverse decision and the participant's rights to a USDA National Appeals Division hearing in accordance with 7 CFR part 11. Any adverse decision, whether appealable or non-appealable may be reviewed by the next-level RHS supervisor.

#### **§ 3550.5 Environmental requirements.**

(a) *Policy.* RHS will consider environmental quality as equal with economic, social, and other relevant factors in program development and decision-making processes. RHS will take into account potential environmental impacts of proposed projects by working with RHS applicants, other federal agencies, Indian tribes, State and local governments, and interested citizens and organizations in order to formulate actions that advance the program's goals in a manner that will protect, enhance, and restore environmental quality.

(b) *Regulatory references.* Processing and servicing actions under this part will be done in accordance with the requirements provided in 7 CFR part 1940, subpart G which addresses environmental requirements and 7 CFR part 1924, subpart A, which addresses lead-based paint.

#### **§ 3550.6 State law or State supplement.**

State and local laws and regulations, and the laws of federally recognized Indian tribes, may affect RHS implementation of certain provisions of this regulation, for example, with respect to the treatment of liens, construction, or environmental policies. Supplemental guidance may be issued in the case of any conflict or significant differences.

#### **§ 3550.7 Demonstration programs.**

From time to time, RHS may authorize limited demonstration programs. The purpose of these demonstration programs is to test new approaches to offering housing under the statutory authority granted to the Secretary. Therefore, such demonstration programs may not be consistent with some of the provisions contained in

this part. However, any program requirements that are statutory will remain in effect. Demonstration programs will be clearly identified as such.

#### § 3550.8 Exception authority.

An RHS official may request, and the Administrator or designee may make, an exception to any requirement or provision of this part or address any omission of this part that is consistent with the applicable statute if the Administrator determines that application of the requirement or provision, or failure to take action in the case of an omission, would adversely affect the Government's interest.

#### § 3550.9 Conflict of interest.

(a) *Objective.* It is the objective of RHS to maintain the highest standards of honesty, integrity, and impartiality by employees. To reduce the potential for employee conflict of interest, all processing, approval, servicing, or review activity will be conducted in accordance with 7 CFR part 1900, subpart D by RHS employees who:

- (1) Are not themselves the applicant or borrower;
- (2) Are not members of the family or close known relatives of the applicant or borrower;
- (3) Do not have an immediate working relationship with the applicant or borrower, the employee related to the applicant or borrower, or the employee who would normally conduct the activity; or
- (4) Do not have a business or close personal association with the applicant or borrower.

(b) *Applicant or borrower responsibility.* The applicant or borrower must disclose any known relationship or association with an RHS employee when such information is requested.

(c) *RHS employee responsibility.* An RHS employee must disclose any known relationship or association with a recipient, regardless of whether the relationship or association is known to others. RHS employees or members of their families may not purchase a Real Estate Owned (REO) property, security property from a borrower, or security property at a foreclosure sale. Loan closing agents who have been involved

with a particular property, as well as members of their families, are also precluded from purchasing such properties.

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#### § 3550.10 Definitions.

*Acceleration.* Demand for immediate repayment of the entire balance of a debt if the security instruments are breached.

*Adjusted income.* Used to determine whether an applicant is income-eligible. Adjusted income provides for deductions to account for varying household circumstances and expenses. See § 3550.54 for a complete description of adjusted income.

*Adjustment.* An agreement to release a debtor from liability generally upon receipt of an initial lump sum representing the maximum amount the debtor can afford to pay and periodic additional payments over a period of up to 5 years.

*Amortized payment.* Equal monthly payments under a fully amortized mortgage loan that provides for the scheduled payment of interest and principal over the term of the loan.

*Applicant.* An adult member of the household who will be responsible for repayment of the loan.

*Assumption.* The procedure whereby the transferee becomes liable for all or part of the debt of the transferor.

*Borrower.* A recipient who is indebted under the section 502 or 504 programs.

*Cancellation.* A decision to cease collection activities and release the debtor from personal liability for any remaining amounts owed.

*Compromise.* An agreement to release a debtor from liability upon receipt of a specified lump sum that is less than the total amount due.

*Conditional commitment.* A determination that a proposed dwelling will qualify as a program-eligible property. The conditional commitment does not reserve funds, nor does it ensure that a program-eligible applicant will be available to buy the dwelling.

*Cosigner.* An individual or an entity that joins in the execution of a promissory note to compensate for any deficiency in the applicant's repayment ability. The cosigner becomes jointly